

HISTORIC CONNECTION

A newsletter of the city of Las Vegas Department of Planning. The Historic Preservation Commission is dedicated to saving the city's legacy and heritage.

Woodlawn Cemetery Celebrates Its 100th Year

by Commissioner Dorothy Wright

One hundred years ago the city of Las Vegas accepted a donation of 10 acres of land from the Union Pacific Railroad's subsidiary, the Las Vegas Land and Water Company, to develop a community cemetery. Previously, starting in 1905, most burials were in what was called the Ranch Cemetery, adjacent to where Woodlawn is today. But calls for a city-owned and maintained facility, beginning in 1910, culminated in the acquisition of land and the design of the new cemetery in 1914.

Woodlawn Cemetery is located at 1500 Las Vegas Blvd. North, between Foremaster Lane and Owens Avenue. Anderson Dairy can be seen just to the south. The original 10 acres faces Las Vegas Boulevard, and that is where the oldest burials are located.

The headstones, some of which feature elaborately carved statuary, are wonderful examples of creative expression from the early 20th century. They also mark a "Who's Who" of early Las Vegas families. A few of the notables at rest in Woodlawn are prominent local attorney Harley A. Harmon, gambler Nick the Greek, gunslinger "Diamond" Jack Davis and agricultural innovator Bill Tomiyasu.

Pioneer Las Vegas J. T. McWilliams, an engineer, designed the original 10 acres of what was eventually to become a 40 acre cemetery. With 25 foot roadways and five foot buffers for



Woodlawn Cemetery headstone

parking, the burial grounds were designed with extensive open spaces between the plots. The later sections did not have such generous buffers between the rows. The initial design also called for extensive landscaping and rows of cottonwoods to grace the grounds. Since the terrain is flat, the layout of the roadways and the landscaping provide aesthetic variations. McWilliams and his family are interred at Woodlawn.

Woodlawn Cemetery is not only a historic treasure, but it is still a community resource used by many Las Vegas families. The facility was expanded in 1944 with another 10 acres, and in 1954 with a final 20. There are sections reserved for military, religious, social and ethnic communities, as well as a chronological development which can be seen starting with the oldest part of the cemetery.

On Nov. 21, 2006, Woodlawn Cemetery was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, under Criteria A: Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history and Criteria C: Embodies the work of a master (J. T. McWilliams.) This important historic resource is one of the oldest remaining oases of history and culture in the fast-changing city of Las Vegas. HC



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A Surveyor's Letter From January 2, 1927 Sheds Light On The Construction Of The Railroad

by Chairman Bob Stoldal

A letter from surveyor J.T. McWilliams to his friend, William H. Heise, was buried for more than eighty years until recently discovered by Paul Carson. Carson, a member of the Nevada State Museum staff, was reviewing the files of Las Vegas attorney Leo McNamee. McNamee at one point represented what was commonly known as the Salt Lake Route Railroad. For an unknown reason McWilliams sent a copy of his letter to McNamee.

Truly a Nevada pioneer, McWilliams created in 1904 what he called the "Original Las Vegas" Townsite on land bounded by Bonanza Road, Washington Avenue, A and H streets on the south, north, east and west respectively.

The J.T. McWilliams Elementary School website includes the following information; "John Thomas McWilliams was born on Dec. 10, 1863. He was a railroad surveyor and civil engineer who helped pave the way for Southern Nevada. "I gladly gave my time," he said, "for the future of what will be a magic city."

The six page typed letter was written to his friend in Los Angeles William "Bill" Heise, an inventor and engineer. Heise also owned land in Las Vegas.

McWilliams opened his letter; "Bill, tell your wife if I was offered a present of a clear deed to all of Los Angeles, containing a clause to make the deed legally valid, that I should permanently reside in Los Angeles, I would thank your wife, take you to a good dinner and say the Great American Desert has been my home for nearly 40 years and will be until our dear Lord makes out his final order."

The majority of the letter is focused on criticism of J. Ross Clark, the younger brother of U.S. Senator William Andrew Clark. However, McWilliams praised the senior Clark as "a prince among men, who I really loved, as I had worked for and learned the kind of man he was." McWilliams went on to call him "our friend," and the "man who was opening up a new part of the west" and "to whom belongs solely the credit of our having the Salt Lake

Railroad today in Las Vegas."

After battling with the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR), who also had plans to connect Salt Lake City with Los Angeles, Senator Clark quietly cut a deal with the UPRR. The deal resulted in the UPRR owning half of the new railroad, but leaving the Clark's in charge of construction. And those decisions were left in the hands of J. Ross Clark. According to McWilliams, the younger Ross didn't know anything about building a railroad; "The real honest-to-goodness experienced railroad employees classed J. Ross Clark" as just "a trusted clerk," and, "I never dreamed that it would take so many years for this country to develop, our main hold back has been the pin headedness of the officials of the railroad."

McWilliams' problems with J. Ross Clark started after Clark's brother purchased the "Old Vegas ranch and the old Kiel ranch they sincerely believed that they had purchased the Vegas Valley and the said officials mis-lead" Senator Clark.

During the period 1902-1904 McWilliams was employed by the railroad to produce a survey of the land in the Las Vegas Valley. McWilliams said their "first mistake was not in buying the additional lands adjoining the old Las Vegas Ranch which I had recommended the purchase of during the progress of survey." J. Ross Clark "promptly answered that 1840 acres was all that the company required at Las Vegas" and to "go ahead and complete the survey or they might send someone else to make the report." Needing a job, McWilliams continued.

McWilliams reported to a friend the problems J. Ross Clark caused because of his lack of understanding of what the railroad owned in the Las Vegas Valley, and what the railroad needed to build an infrastructure in Las Vegas. Along with the final survey work McWilliams sent a "map and letter" that "waked J. Ross Clark up, or to tell the truth, his secretary who insisted that where there was so much smoke there must be a little fire. That secretary was Walter Comstock." Comstock advised getting options on the additional land at "\$4 and \$5 per acre." But the options were "allowed to lapse" and the younger Clark was forced to soon buy the same land at much higher prices.

McWilliams pointed out this was not the only land mistake the railroad made. Along with the ice plant orders came in to the field engineers to "lay out the yards and shops." With the orders came "maps and plans for yards and shop buildings at Las Vegas. The

Chief engineer was led to believe by J. Ross Clark that they owned everything required at Las Vegas and made the necessary plans for shops and yards... the field engineer took one hour to learn [the railroad company] did not own a foot of the ground covered by the plans."

According to the letter the field engineer telegraphed his finding to the home office, stating, "the legal department verified the engineer's report and right of way men ordered to make new deals. They did at \$25 per acre, five to six times the price" it was valued at months earlier.

McWilliams wrote when "I arrived in Las Vegas in December 1904, and found the Armour Packing Company constructing an ice plant." The massive concrete foundation had been laid and work on the second floor had started on the ice plant near the Las Vegas creek "about 100 feet northerly from the Vegas Ranch land." He confronted the construction supervisor and told him "I owned the ground and he laughed at me" and "stated to me that Senator Clark had driven the stake" where to build the ice plant.

McWilliams said once the word got to Los Angeles that the railroad did not own the land; "J. Ross Clark simply ordered the removal of the site to a site 4,900 feet towards Los Angeles on ground that he was now sure of owning as he had just paid \$25 per acre for it."

McWilliams further pointed out what he said was "one of the many other mistakes which the officials of the railroad company led Senator Clark to make."

"I must state another instance of rank and rottenness" of the J. Ross Clark "regime" which emptied "the cesspool end of sewer leading from railroad shops into Vegas Creek." Clean water from the creek was critical to the small community. McWilliams said, "all of our town milk supply at that date came from the old ranch; all of our butchered meats were washed in waters of Vegas Creek... we had had three typhoid epidemics."

McWilliams charged the younger Clark "undertook to break me" and "I went to work for myself as a free-lance and have been so ever since." He told his Los Angeles friend, "Boy, it has been a struggle and many lean years" and "while some in the community called me a no account drunkard," without "the loyal help and love of my dear wife all through to this day I could not have possibly succeeded to where I can truthfully state that I owe no man a dollar and also no man knows what we own or the many interests we have." McWilliams signed the letter "Very truly yours, J. T. (continued on page 4)

HP Update:

Ward 1 Oral History Project

The Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries is conducting oral histories in one of the oldest residential developments in the Las Vegas Valley. The project area is located in Ward 1 and includes neighborhoods such as Rancho Circle, McNeil, Scotch Eighties, Westleigh, the Pintos and several others. Oral historians have learned much from this close-knit community that uses Facebook to invite neighbors for Coffee on the Curb, an event that brings families together to converse and enjoy hot drinks and bagels on the sidewalk. The Oral History Research Center is seeking anyone who currently lives in Ward 1 (length of time does not matter) and those who lived there but moved to other parts of the city for interviews. Please call (702) 895-2222 if you would like to participate.

Collaborative To Document The African American Experience In Las Vegas

The inaugural event to launch the web portal of the Collaborative to Document the African American Experience in Las Vegas was held on Jan. 24, 2013. Several of the community advisory team were on hand to talk to the press. African Americans of all ages and from throughout the community gathered to tell stories. You can find these and many more along with documents, photographs, and manuscript collections at <http://digital.library.unlv.edu/aae>. The portal is not complete. The project to document the black experience in Las Vegas still needs your stories. Please call the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries at (702) 895-2222.

New Appointments on the HPC

On Jan. 22, 2014, the Commission appointed former Vice Chair Bob Stoldal as HPC Chair to replace former Chair Dorothy Wright, and Commissioner Claytee White as Vice-Chair. Please join the Commission in congratulating our new Chair and Vice Chair.

Historic Preservation Commission Centennial Legacy Grant

The deadline for submitting an application for the HPC Centennial Legacy Grant is Aug. 1, 2014. Grants are limited to \$5,000 and are for historic preservation projects within the city of Las Vegas boundaries. Past grant projects include lectures, educational materials, and historical architecture tours. For more information and to download an application, please visit www.lasvegasnevada.gov/hp.

City Of Las Vegas Centennial Grant

Grants are for historic preservation projects within the city of Las Vegas boundaries, and are limited to \$100,000. Past grant projects include historic preservation events, lectures, educational materials and historic property restoration and rehabilitation. For more information, please contact Esther Carter at (702) 229-6672, or ecarter@lasvegasnevada.gov.

Phase II: Huntridge Neighborhood Historic Survey is Underway

The city of Las Vegas is conducting a historic resource survey of the Huntridge Neighborhood Tract 3 which is generally bound by Cottonwood Place and Francis Avenue on the north, Huntridge



Huntridge Home

Circle Park on the west, Norman Avenue on the south, and South 15th Street on the east. The city receives funding each year from the National Park Service to fulfill its obligations to the state and the city's Historic Preservation Commission to maintain an inventory of historic neighborhoods. Knowing where our historic resources are helps the city and state evaluate how infrastructure projects such as roads and utilities may impact historic neighborhoods. Surveys also help neighborhoods that are considering historic designation as a means of preserving their neighborhood for future generations. For more information about types of designation and the process and impacts of designation, please see the "Historic Designation Ordinance" and the "Differences between National Register and Local Historic Districts" at the city's historic preservation website www.lasvegasnevada.gov/hp. HC

Upcoming Events:

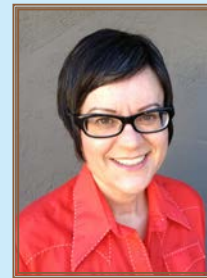
Historic Preservation And Archaeology Month

May is National Preservation Month, celebrated with help from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Locally we celebrate Historic Preservation and Archaeology Month with historically themed events such as the Helldorado Parade on May 17, and the Vintage Vegas Food Tour on May 10 and 24.

The Vintage Vegas Food Tour is a collaboration between the HPC, Nevada Humanities and Vegas (continued on page 4)

Biography Corner:

City of Las Vegas Historic Preservation Officer Courtney Mooney, AICP



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Courtney Mooney is the Urban Design Coordinator and Historic Preservation Officer for the city of Las Vegas. Her passion is historic preservation in a city that she enjoys and cherishes. Immediately, one is taken in by Courtney's smile and captivating sense of humor. In the living room of the mid-century modern home she

shares with her husband, two dogs and a cat is proudly displayed her vintage Honda café racer motorcycle. Intellectual yet down-to-earth, she and her husband are not the typical couple.

Courtney considers herself, "almost more of a 'downtownist' than an historic preservationist. I look at preserving neighborhoods or buildings as a community preservation model, not just saving the individual building for that particular building's sake." This holistic approach helps Courtney in her work, whether assisting the city's Historic Preservation Commission realize their goals and objectives, coaching neighborhoods through the historic designation process, conducting surveys of World War II housing tracts or celebrating significant historic African American sites.

A true Nevadan, she was born in Elko and raised in Carson City. Her father was a psychologist by profession and blacksmith by passion. Originally from Wyoming he raised Courtney to survive in the west, teaching her how to work on cars, shoot guns and even taught her how to box. But her true love for objects from the past was most likely forged from the "no plastic rule" in her childhood home. Anything manufactured after Bakelite went out of style was considered "low quality" by her parents. Everything in the house was salvaged or inherited antiques, and her earliest toys were handmade or parts of machinery that would probably be considered dangerous by today's standards.

Courtney's step-mother, also a Nevada native, encouraged her to become an historic architect to save Nevada's buildings before she even knew what that was. Using her early lessons in independence and self-reliance, Courtney moved to Las Vegas to earn an undergraduate degree in architecture from the University of Nevada Las Vegas, and to New York City where she earned a graduate degree in Historic Preservation from Columbia University. Although Courtney finds less need to box these days, she continues to advocate for preservation as a key component of a livable and sustainable Las Vegas community. HC

Lost

"Editor's note: This section of the newsletter features significant restoration projects, preservation successes and threatened resources but not necessarily one of each in every issue."

Lost: Clark County Courthouse



Clark County Courthouse,
courtesy Las Vegas News Bureau

Built in 1960, this Mid-Century modern gem was designed by local architecture firm Zick & Sharp on the site where the original city hall and library were built in 1914. The building sat on land that was dedicated by the Union Pacific Rail Road at the land auction in 1905 for use as a court, city hall, jail and library. After the Regional Justice Center opened in 2005, the building sat vacant until 2013 when it was purchased by the owners of the D and Golden Gate Casino on Fremont Street. The building has been demolished.

Walter Zick and Harris Sharp partnered in 1949 and worked together in Las Vegas until Sharp retired in 1980. The prolific firm designed dozens of civic, governmental, residential and commercial buildings. Among the most notable of their designs were the Moulin Rouge Hotel and Casino (1955), the Mint Hotel and Casino (1957), the Foley Federal Building (1964) and the Paradise Village Subdivision (1950) in the Beverly Green Neighborhood, downtown Las Vegas. HC



The Historic Preservation Commission is an 11-member board made up of community members appointed by the Las Vegas City Council. The board is responsible for hearing and making recommendations regarding the designation of historic landmarks, properties and districts to the city's historic register; overseeing alterations and new construction of designated historic properties and making recommendations to the City Council. Meetings: Fourth Wednesday of each month, 12:15 p.m., City Hall, City Clerk's Conference Room, 495 S. Main St., Las Vegas, NV 89101 except in November and December when they are often combined.

Bob Stoldal, chairperson
Claytee White, vice-chairperson
Dorothy Wright
Mary Hausch
Patrick J. Klenk
Robert Bellis
Jarmilla McMillan-Arnold
Jack LeVine
Colleen Beck
Donald Hotchkiss, Jr., P.E.
Richard Serfas
David Millman, ex-officio

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2013 Mayor's Urban Design Awards (MUDA)

Las Vegas Mayor Carolyn G. Goodman awarded four exceptional projects for the 2013 MUDAs at the annual State of the City Address on Jan. 9. Each project fosters the city's commitment to historic preservation, sustainability and livability in one of four categories. For more information, visit www.lasvegasnevada.gov/muda.



Atomic Liquors, photo by June Johns

The 2013 MUDA winners are:

- Building and Environment: Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada
- Public Places: Historic Lorenzi Park improvements and interpretive markers
- Public Art: "Rise Above" street art sponsored by the Life Is Beautiful Festival
- Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse: Atomic Liquors HC

A Surveyor's Letter – continued from page 2

McWilliams owner of Las Vegas original town site and county surveyor."

A complete copy of the typewritten letter is available at the Nevada State Museum, Las Vegas, in the McNamee collection 058, Box 159, Folder 31. If you want to read more

about J. T. McWilliams, a good starting point is an article by the late journalist K. J. Evans whose writings have preserved much of the history of our community, at www.reviewjournal.com/news/jt-mcwilliams. HC

Upcoming Events – continued from page 3

Valley Food Tours. The afternoon tours are a combination of walking and bus. The tours will start at 4:30 pm at the Historic El Cortez Hotel & Casino on Sixth and Fremont Streets in downtown Las Vegas, proceed through the downtown area to five restaurants and end at Atomic Liquors on Ninth and Fremont Streets. Participants will be treated to unique tastings and historical information provided by each location, as well as a brief jaunt through the historic Las Vegas High School and John S. Park neighborhoods. For more details, please visit www.vegasvalleyfoodtours.com and www.nevadahumanities.org.

Nevada's 150th Anniversary Celebration

Nevada became the 36th state to enter the union of the United States of America on Oct. 31, 1864. The state is planning a massive celebration of the 150th anniversary of statehood with events that share the history, culture and future with all who cherish our state. To fund events throughout the state, Nevada has released the 150th license plates, available now at your local DMV. For more information, please visit www.nevada150.org.



The Sands Copa Connection Program Series

This four-program public history

series, hosted by the Junior League of Las Vegas, will focus on the impact of the former Las Vegas Sands legendary Copa Showroom on the development and expansion of Las Vegas in the 1950s and 60s. During the 2014 Nevada Sesquicentennial Celebration, the Junior League in collaboration with various community partners will present this series that spotlights the defining mid-century period in Las Vegas history in connection with Antonio Morelli. Morelli was the orchestra leader of the Sands Copa Showroom Orchestra from 1954-72 and also the original owner of the League's historic mid-century Morelli House preservation project that was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2012. The programs will highlight the Sands' Copa Girls, the music that was performed at the showroom, and its most famous Rat Pack entertainer, Frank Sinatra. Audiences will receive a specially created Commemorative Copa Connection booklet and view an historic photo exhibit at each of the series' programs, made possible by a grant from Nevada Humanities. For more information about the Sands Copa Connection Program Series or the Morelli House Preservation Project contact info@JLLV.org or call (702) 822-6536. HC